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Boston is winning the offseason so far. 20

Chris Hemsworth shows off his sea legs. 14

Josh Gondelman is Boston's nice guy. 16

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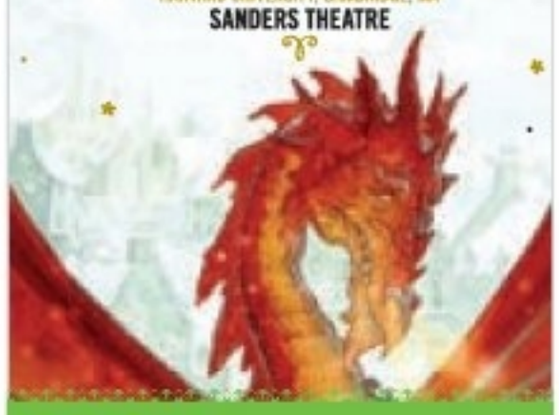

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LOCO-MOTION

Red-faced T officials are investigating whether operator error was behind yesterday's "Ghost Train," which took off carrying 50 passengers — but no driver. 10-11

NICOLAUS CZARNECKI

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1 US NORTHWEST STORMS

Residents of the Pacific Northwest were hit by fresh storms Thursday after the region received record-breaking rainfall that left two dead in Oregon and triggered widespread flooding, landslides, road closures and power cuts. Periods of heavy rain and fierce winds will continue across the Pacific Northwest and down into northern California. REUTERS

2 MUSLIM OFFICE THREAT

The U.S. Muslim advocacy group Council on American-Islamic Relations said Thursday its Capitol Hill office was evacuated by police after a foreign substance was received in the mail. The office received an envelope containing a note that read, "Die a painful death, Muslims," and a white powder, according to CAIR staff attorney Maha Sayed. "Our fear is at a pretty high level at this time, given the anti-Muslim rhetoric going on," said Sayed. REUTERS

3 GUNS IN CLASSROOMS

A University of Texas advisory committee has reluctantly recommended allowing handguns in classrooms when a state law goes into effect Aug. 1, 2016. The state's "campus carry" law allows people 21 and older with a concealed handgun license to carry handguns in classrooms. REUTERS

MAYOR VISITS ROBOTIC CLASS

Mayor Marty Walsh made a visit to a robotics class at the O'Bryant school in Roxbury on Thursday in celebration of Computer Science Education Week. The mayor watched Luis Vargas, 17, demonstrate the robot he built for the Best Robotics competition.

7 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

MAIN PHOTO BY NICOLAUS CZARNECKI, ALL OTHER PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

4 NO GUN SALES TO NO FLY

Connecticut would become the first U.S. state to ban the sale of guns to people on government watch lists under an executive order that Gov. Dannel Malloy said he will sign. The measure, which Malloy said needs federal approval, would require state police to review whether a potential gun buyer was on the federal no-fly list or on a watchlist of people suspected of ties to terrorism. REUTERS

5 TRUMP DUMPED IN DUBAI

A Dubai real estate firm building a $6 billion golf complex with Donald Trump on Thursday stripped the property of his name and image amid a backlash over the presidential candidate's proposal to ban all Muslims from entering the United States. Trump triggered an international uproar when he made his comments in response to last week's deadly shootings in California by two Muslims who authorities said were radicalized. DAMAC Properties initially had said it would stand by Trump. REUTERS

6 POISONING DOG CHARGES

A woman from Westford, Massachusetts, has been accused of poisoning her neighbor's dog earlier this month and now faces a single charge of poisoning an animal. If found guilty, she faces a maximum sentence of seven years and a $5,000 fine, LowellSun.com reports. MATT LEE

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These are the DIY lightsabers you're looking for

Somerville nonprofit Parts and Crafts uses the "Star Wars" weapons to teach kids about engineering.

SPENCER BUELL
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spencer.buell@metro.us

May the force be with you, and also with budding Boston-area engineers.

A Somerville family "hackerspace" is celebrating the return of the "Star Wars" franchise with another installment of its make-your-own lightsaber meet-ups, inviting area youngsters to whip up a handmade version of the battle weapon of choice for intergalactic warriors.

"Pretty much every kid who comes through here at one point or another builds a lightsaber."
Gjertson

Made of polycarbonate tubes and threaded with LED lights in the color and style of their choosing, kids taking part get to take home a "very strong" replica, durable enough to outlast even the most enthusiastic duels, said Dina Gjertsen, after-school coordinator for Parts and Crafts, the nonprofit behind the idea.

"You can actually smash them against each other without having them shatter," Gjertsen said. "Because what you want to do is hit something with it."

It's become a tradition to let participants duke it out in a darkened basement once the builds are complete, she said. "It's really cool to watch."

Parts and Crafts hosts a day program for homeschoolers, summer camps and a number of quirky meet-ups designed to get kids interested in engineering and confident enough to tackle hands-on projects of their own. On its most recent calendar are a class on building DIY music synthesizers and a series on pyrotechnics.

Teacher Zach Hirschtritt helps student Amelie Calamia, 9, build a lightsaber during a class at Parts and Crafts in Somerville on Thursday. NICOLAUS CZARNECKI

The nonprofit has been a collaborator with groups like the Somerville Arts Council and the Mystic and Clarendon Hill housing projects.

The lightsaber builds, a half-dozen so far, have been Parts and Crafts' "marquee" programs — their most popular offering by far, Gjertson said, and possibly their most bridge-building educational tool.

"That's why we call it 'one lightsaber per child.' Like 'one laptop per child,' but with lightsabers," she said. "Pretty much every kid who comes through here at one point or another builds a lightsaber."

There are plans to host traveling "Star Wars"-themed builds, she said, possibly stopping by at an area movie theater.

The upcoming event at Parts and Crafts headquarters on Somerville Avenue on Dec. 19, the same weekend "Star Wars: Episode VII" hits theaters, is a fund-raiser to support programs and outreach.

Tickets are $30 per family plus $10 for each additional sword.

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Northeastern's gun plan blasted

Northeastern police plan to equip some officers with tactical rifles, despite objections from Boston police and city councilors.

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Northeastern University NICOLAUS CZARNECKI

Two Boston City Councilors decried the decision by the Northeastern University Police Department to arm its officers with semiautomatic rifles and called for a council hearing on the matter.

"Assault rifles are the last thing we need in NUPD patrol cars," Councilors Tito Jackson and Josh Zakim said in a letter to Northeastern President Joseph Aoun. "This is a step backwards for community policing and encourages mistrust and fear between NUPD and Northeastern students, as well as Mission Hill and Roxbury residents who often come into contact with NUPD."

The councilors said that Northeastern failed to inform the Boston police and the legislation of the department's decision to up its firepower in the wake of mass shootings across the county and terrorist attacks abroad.

NUPD is joining Boston University, MIT, Tufts and UMass Boston in arming specially trained officers with weapons that the departments have chosen to respond to an active shooter.

Boston Police Commissioner Bill Evans is also less than thrilled by the news of Northeastern's Police Chief Michael Davis' decision.

"I can remember having a dialogue not long ago about whether they should be carrying handguns," Evans told WGBH on Monday. "Now we're talking about a dialogue on whether they should have patrol rifles. Obviously I don't think they're necessary. We can be on those campuses within five or six minutes. We're highly trained."

The move calls for 20 officers to carry semiautomatic rifles in their cruisers in the event of an armed assailant. on campus The rifles would only be distributed during such a high-level threat.

A representative from Northeastern Police Department said he could not comment on which models the department would be using.

"There is no higher priority than the safety and well-being of our campus community," Northeastern spokesman John O'Neill said. "Our officers are trained to employ a number of capabilities to protect the campus community, including the use of tactical rifles if necessary."

One local gun expert thinks that the negative reaction is misguided,

"These weapons are antiques, this is not new technology," said Jim Wallace, executive director of the Gun Owners Action League. "Semiautomatics are no different than handguns, you pull the trigger, one round goes off. These tools are defensive in nature in the hands of law enforcement."

Wallace said that while the need to protect the innocent is paramount, there is a threshold where overarming officers would be dangerous, but tactical rifles do not fit that bill.

"That doesn't mean they should have tanks and heavy machinery, but these are common weapons," Wallace said. "There is a huge misperception between what could happen, what does happen and what has happened when it comes to these kinds of weapons. The last thing you want to do is react to a situation underarmed."

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CAN THERE BE A LIBERAL ARGUMENT FOR GUNS?

ERNEST OWENS

The Ernest Opinion

Award-winning multimedia journalist Ernest Owens is a keen observer of social, LGBT and race issues in Philadelphia. Follow him @MrErnestOwens

My great-grandfather, Daniel Johnson, was a proud veteran and gun carrier.

He owned guns that were handed down by previous generations of sharecroppers that were once slaves across the Mason-Dixon line.

He passed away in his hometown of Marianna, Arkansas, in the Deep South, where I spent every summer as a child.

The guns were more than prized possessions. They were a responsibilty — as they would have been for any black man who legally owned a gun down there.

For decades, the Second Amendment didn't really apply to men who looked like my grandfather. Then and now, there is often a look of fear in the eyes of whites that sell a gun to blacks in America.

Marianna was no exception.

You might presume a gun owner from Arkansas — whatever his race — would be conservative, but my grandfather was a loyal Democrat who lived long enough to see our nation's first black president get elected.

Still, he never let go of those guns and now our family inherits them.

We are fairly liberal, but all the outcry for the total overhaul of gun possession leaves me conflicted — as is, I suspect, much of America.

Much of the rhetoric makes gun control a politicized issue that looks plainly partisan when in reality it's more complex than that.

Americans all throughout the nation — whether a Democrat or a Republican or from the West, or Northeast or South — have guns.

Throughout this cross-section our nation hunts and collects and goes to ranges and shoots skeet and does police work and obeys the law.

And the bad actors — those who use them to kill and rob — come from the full spectrum of political and regional ideologies as well.

That complicates matters.

It's not as simple to draw battle lines as with other controversial national issues, where there were clear divisions between the "yes" group and "no" group.

Guns are a completely different matter.

For example, the ACLU, a bastion of liberality whose purpose is to protect Constitutional rights, has no interest in protecting individual Second Amendment rights. Despite a Supreme Court ruling to the contrary, they maintain it is a "collective" right of the people, not a right of individuals to own guns.

And, as progressive as he has been on other issues, Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders is no proponent of strict gun control.

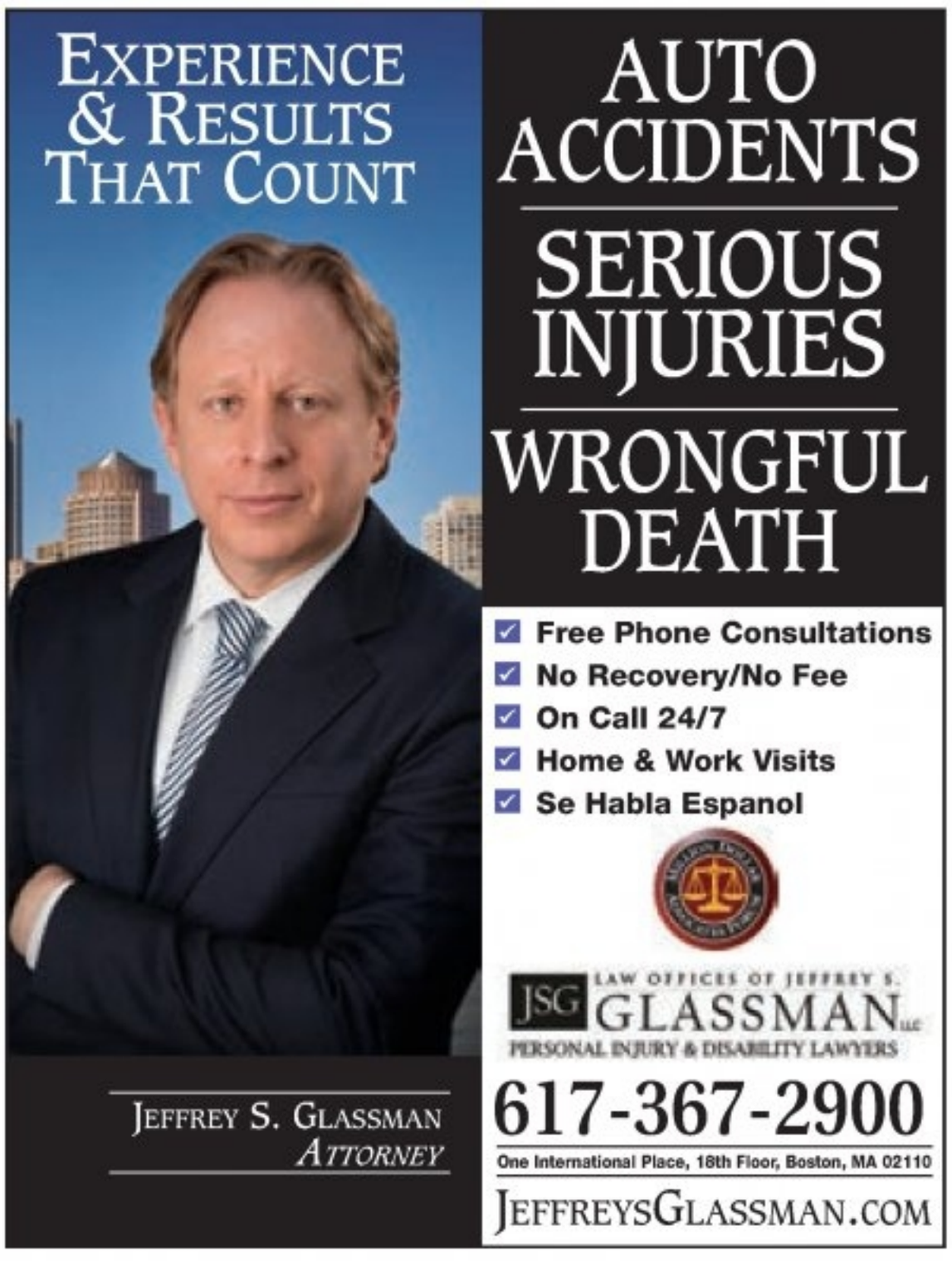
"I come from a state that has virtually no gun control and, thank God [knocks on wood], has a reasonably low crime rate," the Vermont senator said recently to Rolling Stone. "That is the culture of my state."

And that, for me, represents the often-ignored nuance in the gun policy debate.

I was born in Chicago, spent summers down South, and now live in Philly — places with different viewpoints on the subject. I've seen the spectrum of gun possession, good and bad.

And that's why consensus on national gun policy is hard to achieve; how people view guns is as varied as to how people culturally interact with one.

This simply isn't black and white, as it is often portrayed in the media. Just as much as it isn't a red and blue matter to divide down party lines.



Help Metro make magic

Please donate to the Metro Magic annual holiday toy drive during the 2015 holiday season.

In keeping with the holiday spirit of giving, Metro is once again launching Tony's Metro Magic, our annual toy drive for underprivileged children in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

This year marks the seventh anniversary of the toy drive, which was renamed in memory of the man who oversaw the project for more than four years, Tony Metcalf, Metro's longest-running editor-in-chief. Mr. Metcalf passed away in 2013 from colon cancer at the age of 50.

Metcalf lit up every year as he saw the faces of children unwrap their holiday gifts. It is our goal to keep that magic alive. We are now asking readers to contribute what they can to Tony's Metro Magic.

Metro has created a wish list at the Target website that readers can access by going to www.metro.us and clicking on the Tony's Metro Magic logo.

From there, just choose the toys you wish to donate, pay online using Target's secure payment system. Your gifts, along with your name attached, will be delivered to Metro's offices in each city. This season we hope you will remember the children who will spend the holidays in shelters or who may not have gifts to open. Even one small gift can make a big difference in a child's holiday season.

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Lilliana, 2, opens up a present. NICOLAUS CZARNECKI

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‘Operator error’ focus of train

The Red Line train that left Braintree Station without a conductor is investigated at the MBTA yard on Thursday. NICOLAUS CZARNECKI

About 50 passengers were aboard the train, which was stopped by cutting power to the third rail.

MORGAN ROUSSEAU AND SPENCER BUELL
@MetroBOS
letters@metro.us

Investigators have made “operator error” the focus of a probe into how a Boston Red Line train ended up leaving Braintree Station on Thursday morning without an MBTA driver at its helm.

The operator, a 51-year-old who had worked with the MBTA for more than 25 years, has been placed on paid leave while an investigation is underway, officials said.

About 50 passengers were on board the train as it traveled north before stopping past North Quincy station without a driver, Transportation Secretary Stephanie Pollack said in a news conference Thursday night.

Pollack called the incident an “unacceptable breach” of the T’s safety mandate. “We failed our passengers today,” she said.

The trouble began when the train stopped during a signal error at Braintree Station, MBTA Chief Operating Officer Jeff Gonneville told reporters. The driver received approval to exit the train, then flipped a “bypass” switch, designed to allow the train to travel past the signal, Gonneville said. But for reasons currently being investigated, the train began moving down the tracks, he said.

The driver sustained minor injuries when he was clipped by the train, MBTA spokesman Joe Pesaturo said. No passengers reported injuries, Pollack said.

Gonneville said train overseers knew in about 60 seconds that the driverless train had pulled away and began moving other trains farther down the track out of the way. In fewer than 10 minutes, after the T cut power to the electrified third rail, the train came to a stop, Pollack said.

“We failed our passengers today”

Pollack

Investigators from several departments plan to regroup Friday morning, and officials said more information would be made available when it is complete. There was no discussion at the meeting of criminal charges.

The FBI and Massachusetts State Police have spoken with the T but determined they do not need to join the investigation, Pollack said. The National Transportation Safety Board has not made a decision on whether to participate, she said.

As of 2011, MBTA trains have only one operator, a policy that began to take effect in the 1990s, Gonneville said. Previously, each train had two.

Earlier Thursday, Gov. Charlie Baker said the investigation into the incident would include

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probe

whether what happened on the train was "negligence versus something else."

He also said it was "pretty clear" the controls in the train had been "tampered with," though he felt the incident was "isolated."

T officials Thursday night could not comment on the specific conditions of the controls on the train, which is being held at Cabot Yard in South Boston.

T General Manager Frank DePaola, also earlier in the day, called the incident "highly troubling."

A passenger onboard the train told 7 News that the train was stopped for 30 minutes and nobody knew why.

"We had no idea what happened. ... When we arrived at JFK we overheard people saying that there was definitely no conductor. It was so unusual," she said, adding that rumors started flying that someone had been shot and that there was a power outage.

"The car just started going slow, the lights started flickering then all the lights went off. It stopped and we heard nothing. We knocked on the doors, people were trying to get out," she said.

Regular service resumed on the Red Line around 10 a.m.

'Ghost Train' Twitter account pokes fun at scare

A parody Twitter account that goes by the name "Red Line Ghost Train" was created Thursday hours after a Red Line train barreled past four stations despite having no operator. The person behind the Twitter handle @ghosttrainred began tweeting around 10:30 a.m., four hours after the unmanned train, which was carrying 50 passengers, traveled from Braintree Station to North Quincy station. By 4 p.m., the account had racked up more than 450 followers.

Some zingers from @ghostraininred:

• I promise to lower fares, increase efficiency, and make it a more pleasant ride. Quick poll:@realDonaldTrump or @ghosttrainred for prez?

• You know where's nice to visit? Somerville. @MBTAGreenLine you should check it out someday!#ghosttrain #redline

• The C line train really needs to be careful. Dude stops by that Cleveland Circle Chipotle all the time

Several Bostonians got in on the joke, tweeting at @ghosttrainred with zingers of their own.

• @ghosttrainred Ima leaving on a red train, I don't know when I'll be back again. Leeeeeeaving on a red train. (Lokis Mistress (@JUSTINEMEE)

• @ghosttrainred @BostonGlobe The @MBTA forgot to announce they are beginning "self driving train" beta testing in Boston. This could be huge (Jon Masters (@jonmasters)

BRIEF

MBTA ends GLX contracts

The MBTA has notified several firms working on the overbudget Green Line Extension project that it is acting to end their current contracts, and the agency plans to install a new project manager as part of a restructuring of the project management team.

The move comes after the MassDOT Board and the MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board met publicly and privately on Wednesday to consider options to salvage the project, the cost for which has ballooned by about 50 percent, or $1 billion, higher than budgeted.

"Today's actions are necessary steps to resolving the future of the GLX project," FMCB Chairman Joseph Aiello said in a statement.

T General Manager Frank DePaola told general contractor White-Skanska-Kiewit, project and construction manager HDR/Gilbane, independent cost estimator Stanton Constructability Services and final designer AECOM/HNTB the agency would be taking steps to end their current contracts.

Construction work already underway will continue, according to the MBTA, but no new construction work will be awarded during what the MBTA is calling "the start of a transitional period."

The contractor group White Skanska Kiewit WSK opined that state officials canceled the contract "for convenience."

"WSK is disappointed by the board's decision to cancel the contract for convenience and that we will not be able to see this project through to its completion," the group said in a joint statement. "We continue to be a collaborative partner with the MBTA and the Commonwealth as we focus on finishing the work that is already in progress for the Green Line Extension project." SHNS

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6-year-old boy gets 'bionic' hand, courtesy of 3-D printing technology

A 6-year-old Kentucky boy born with a malformed right hand because of a rare disorder has received what he called his best Christmas gift ever - a "bionic" prosthetic made from 3-D printing technology.

Lucas Abraham, who has wanted a working right hand since he was 2 years old, showed off the new prosthetic made by University of Louisville bioengineering students.

"It's better than every gift that I've ever had before," Lucas told a news conference at the university on Wednesday.

Gina Bertocci, a niversity of Louisville bioengineering professor, said Lucas' hand was the first created by the school for a child and that more could be produced. The university described it as "bionic."

The printer technology greatly reduces the manufacturing cost and the plastics used are similar to those in Lego blocks, allowing the devices to be produced in various colors, Bertocci said.

> *"It's a pretty good Christmas gift."*
> Julie Abraham

Children like it because it makes them look like a Transformer, she added, saying: "Everyone wants to show off their hardware."

The students received assistance from e-NABLE, a global volunteer group that designs and prints prosthetics.

Three hands composed of plastic, leather and wire were made to fit Lucas. He will keep two and the university will retain the third for accreditation purposes, the school said.

Within minutes of receiving his new hand last week, Lucas was able to grasp a ball. He wore the hand to school and was able to shake hands and give his classmates high fives. It also will let him crash cymbals together in music class, Lucas said.

Lucas Abraham CHRISTINAAWILKY@ TWITTER

Lucas' grandmother Julie Abraham said he had shown more confidence in himself since receiving the hand. Abraham had written to the university in August asking if it could do something for him.

REUTERS

THE TRUMPSPIRACY

Walk into a D.C. bar talking about UFOs, faked moon landings, or even the idea that Elvis is still alive and chillaxing in Belize and you'll get only stares. But bring up the conspiracy theory about Donald Trump, and you're in for a long night.

Here it is in a nutshell: Trump, with his polarizing statements and style, is not really running to win the White House. He is running to split the Republican vote, thereby guaranteeing that in the close election everyone expects, Hillary Clinton will win. Even those who may not fully buy into that fantasy are beginning to think this election could play out that way, prompting GOP candidate Carly Fiorina to say this week, "Donald Trump is Hillary Clinton's Christmas gift-wrapped up under a tree."

I'm not sure which tree she was talking about, but the question is "Why would he do this?" And the Trumpspiracists have an answer.

TOM FOREMAN

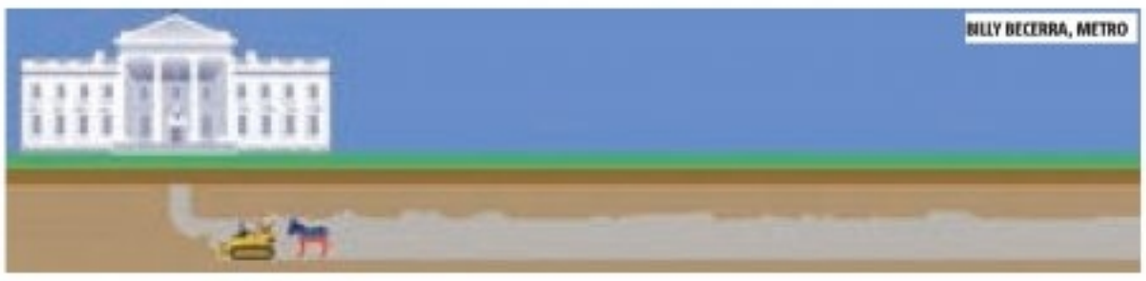
Opinion

CNN's Tom Foreman is the author of the new book "My Year of Running Dangerously."

Trump was once a Democrat. He has donated to Republican candidates, but he's given plenty to Democratic contenders too. He has waffled on GOP cornerstone issues, and he constantly hints that he might run as an Independent. In other words, they argue, he's never been dedicated to the Republican Party — so why couldn't he be a Democratic sleeper?

What's more, they say, while he now spouts nasty lines about Hillary, it was not so long ago he was saying, "I like her, and I like her husband." The Clintons attended his wedding in 2005. Their daughters, Chelsea Clinton and Ivanka Trump, are pals for crying out loud! So desperate Republicans, baffled by Trump's staying power and terrified that he will shatter their election year hopes, find themselves wondering if somehow he is helping the Democrats dig a secret tunnel into the Oval Office.

There is no evidence to support this idea. But when things get weird, conspiracy theories run wild. And Trumpspiracists may not know much, but they know this race is as weird as they come.



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Walmart launches mobile wallet pay

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. launched its own mobile payment service, Walmart Pay, on Thursday, dealing a sharp blow to the ambitions of a mobile wallet the big-box behemoth was working on with other retailers.

Walmart Pay is a free service that will be available on Apple and Android devices. It will allow payments with any major credit, debit, prepaid or Walmart gift card, the company said.

The retail giant said Walmart Pay was developed independently, but it remains associated with CurrentC, the beta-stage mobile wallet Walmart had been developing with a consortium of retailers, as a possible addition to Walmart Pay.

CurrentC — whose developers included Target and Best Buy — was

Walmart GETTY IMAGES

likely to prove strong competition to Apple's Apple Pay.

Walmart doesn't accept Apple Pay.

Walmart Pay requires customers to choose the payment option within the retailer's mobile app at a checkout counter, activate their phone camera and scan the code displayed at the register. An e-receipt is then sent to the app.

The service was introduced in select U.S. stores and is expected to available nationwide by the first half of 2016.

While the mobile-wallet market has gotten more crowded, with big players such as Alphabet Inc.'s Android Pay and Samsung's Samsung Pay, adoption by customers remains sluggish.

Analysts said they see the service as a positive for Walmart.

"[Walmart Pay] fits the trend of scale players in the payments ecosystem looking to control mobile payments by leveraging their content and high traffic apps," JP Morgan analysts wrote in a research note.

Walmart said in the future the service will allow adding other payment options. REUTERS

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Chris Hemsworth, right, tries not to go down with the ship in "In the Heart of the Sea." WARNER BROS. PICTURES

Surf's up with Chris Hemsworth

wknd

THE FUN STARTS HERE

The "Thor" actor swears he didn't lose his lunch while filming "In the Heart of the Sea."

MATT PRIGGE
@mattprigge
matt.prigge@metro.us

Chris Hemsworth is Hollywood's go-to man's man — the hulk you call when you need someone to play "Thor," or send up his hypermasculinity in comedies like "Vacation" and the forthcoming "Ghostbusters" reboot.

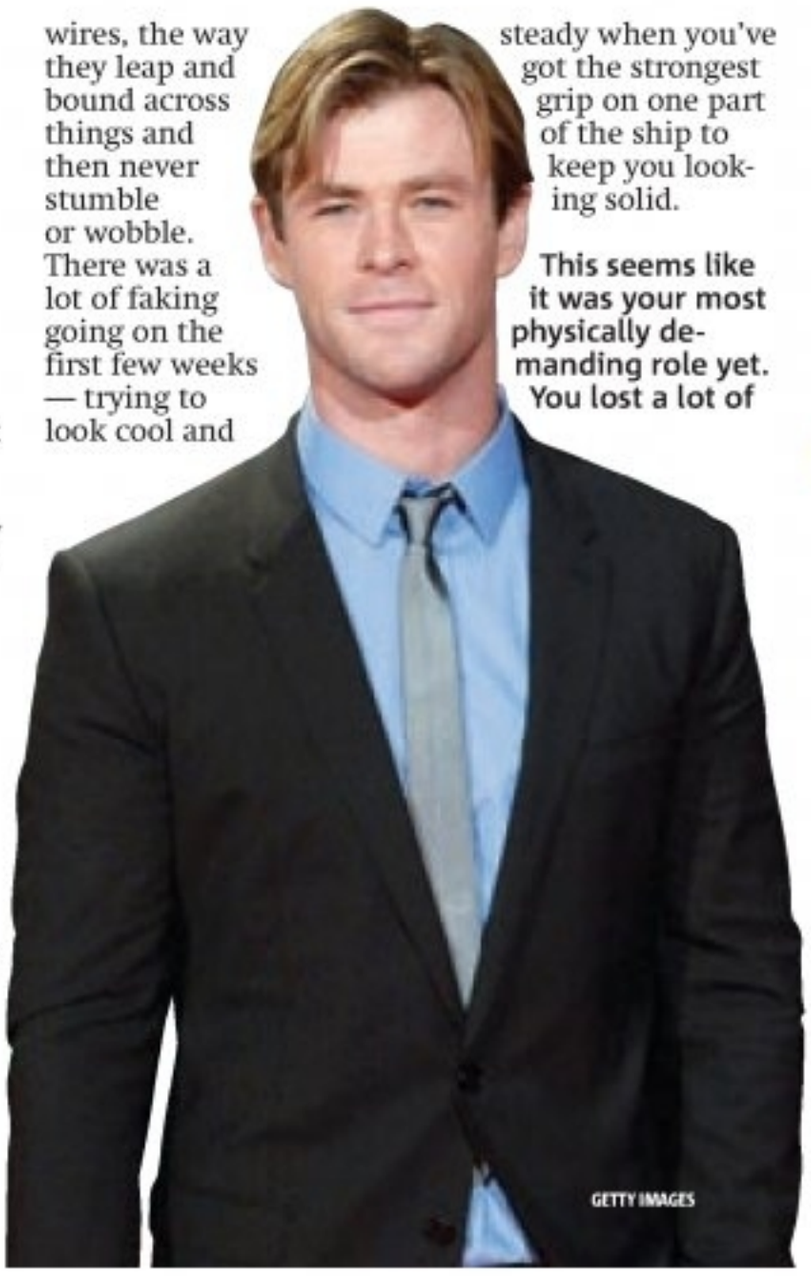
With "In the Heart of the Sea," he's called on to be even more macho than usual. Directed by Ron Howard, it tells the true story of the 1820 sinking of American whaling ship The Essex, which inspired Herman Melville to write "Moby-Dick." He plays the first mate, who is among the survivors who spent months in lifeboats and had to turn to cannibalism to survive.

This was shot for two months in a massive swimming pool tank and another two months actually out at sea, off the Canary Islands. You don't get seasick, do you?

Seventy percent of the crew were throwing up that first week — like, solidly. I was lucky. I had taken all the seasick tablets we were told to take. But having been on the water most of my life — surfing, little bits of fishing — that probably prepared me for it. I just kept my eyes on the horizon, as they say, because I've been seasick before and it's the worst thing in the world.

How about your balance? A ship far out at sea isn't the most stable place.

As good as I thought my balance was, you watch people who do it every day just Peter Pan their way about the place. They look like they're attached to wires, the way they leap and bound across things and then never stumble or wobble. There was a lot of faking going on the first few weeks — trying to look cool and steady when you've got the strongest grip on one part of the ship to keep you looking solid.



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This seems like it was your most physically demanding role yet. You lost a lot of weight for the part.

It was most real experience I've had shooting. There wasn't a lot of the off-switch. You were at sea all day or you were on the whale boats all day. You're just there. You get home and you're still not eating. Then there was dealing with the mood swings and chemical imbalance due to your low-calorie diet. You're in the sun, you're salty, you're wet. On one hand it was incredibly grueling. At the same time it added so much depth to all of our performances, because we were living and breathing that experience as much as possible.

Hunger games

How grueling was it playing someone who turns to cannibalism?

We were pretty damn hungry by the time we shot those scenes. [Laughs] The psychology behind that and that mind-set were things we talked about. At that point it's no longer about being hungry and satisfied; it's more about survival. Do you want to go home? Do you want to see your family? At what cost? Well, here it is. The bigger thing became about how do you deal with that when you come home and try to adjust back into a normal world and into society? If it meant seeing my kids again, then yeah.

We might like to think turning to cannibalism is something in the past. But the Uruguayan rugby team who crash-landed into a mountain — the story told in the film "Alive" — wasn't too long ago.

I remember watching that film at a very young age and thinking, "What would I do?" That's what I like about films and stories like that: they pose a question to you and you've got to think to yourself. It personalizes it.

Eddie Redmayne's education

The Oscar winner learned a lot about the trans community when making "The Danish Girl."

MATT PRIGGE
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Eddie Redmayne is excited to be part of the transgender conversation. In his latest film, "The Danish Girl," the Oscar winner plays Lili Elbe, one of the first people to transition from male to female. "I hope this film can continue that dialogue," he says about the mainstream's recent acceptance of the trans community in films and TV shows such as "Tangerine" and "Orange Is the New Black."

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You were involved with this project for a few years before it was finally greenlit. That seems like it would give you extra time to research.
Exactly. When I was working with [trans director] Lana Wachowski [on "Jupiter Ascending"], I mentioned Lili and Gerda [her former wife, played by Alicia Vikander] to her, and she was incredibly passionate about her story. She pointed me to where I should start. Then I started meeting members of the trans community from different generations. Above and beyond the film, lifewise, it was an amazing thing.

What kinds of things in particular did you learn?
I'd always assumed that being transgender involved some form of physical transformation, and I realized that's absolutely not the case. It's entirely to do with what's in one's mind. All the women I talked to described how they had known from a very early age that they were a different gender than that which they'd been assigned at birth. What was important for me was that when Lili was living as Einar, she was uncomfortable in this guise. There was a drawing of Lili when she was living as a man. She had these high starched collars and this tailored suit. It almost looked like a scaffolding that she had put on herself as a consequence of trying to keep up this masculinity.

How did you feel when you first put on Lili's female attire?
The first time I came on set as Lili, the feeling of nervousness and scrutiny — the gaze of people looking at you — was unnerving. It was interesting because it resonated with what some of the trans women I'd met told me about going out early in their transition. But with them, it's coupled with the absolute fear of violence, whereas I was doing it in a completely safe environment. It was nothing compared to what trans people have to deal with on a day-to-day basis — the real threat of violence.

Eddie Redmayne portrays Lili Elbe both before and after her transition in "The Danish Girl." AGATHA A. NITECKA

Changing times

Over the last few years, there has been an incredible tidal wave of awareness and support for the transgender community. In fact, this has happened in the midst of your involvement with this movie.
It's extraordinary. But what is dumbfounding to me, when I was first reading about Lili and Gerda's story, is they had to deal with violence and discrimination. This is almost 100 years ago. Nowadays, you can be fired in 31 states in America for being trans. The violence against trans women — especially trans women of color — is overwhelming. There's been a great acceleration of acceptance and real conversations in mainstream media, but it's taken such a long time, and there's so much more progress to go.

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Josh Gondelman loves your pure New England spite

The "Last Week Tonight" writer is back in Somerville to record his new comedy special.

MARGARET H. WILLISON
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Comedian Josh Gondelman will perform live at Davis Square Theatre on Dec. 17. MINDY TUCKER

Stoneham native Josh Gondelman will perform at Davis Square Theatre on Thursday, Dec. 17, to record a live comedy album. The 30-year-old "Last Night Tonight" writer's sold-out appearance at the intimate 175-seat black box is part of "Strange Behavior," a monthly standup series hosted by Ryan Donahue.

Gondelman discussed his migration to New York, the dangers of insulting "Good Will Hunting" and how he keeps John Oliver's hit HBO series so damn funny.

You came up in the Boston comedy scene, but now live in New York. So, how does it feel to be an abject betrayer, Judas?

Honestly, it feels so good. I completely understand why Benedict Arnold turned against New England. It's like waves of pure joy lapping up on a beach at sunset. No, obviously, I miss my friends and family a lot. I'm always so happy to come back and visit. After almost five years I have a situation in New York that feels like home rather than the place I'm living, which is very fortunate. But I do wear my Red Sox hat when I go out because I still think I deserve to be yelled at by strangers.

What is the writing process like for "Last Week"? How do you decide which topics to tackle?

It's a really collaborative effort, with story pitches coming from all different pockets of the staff. It's a lot of reading news and trying to find a funny angle on stories that haven't been picked apart all the way yet.

If you were going to satirize Boston on the show, where would you start?

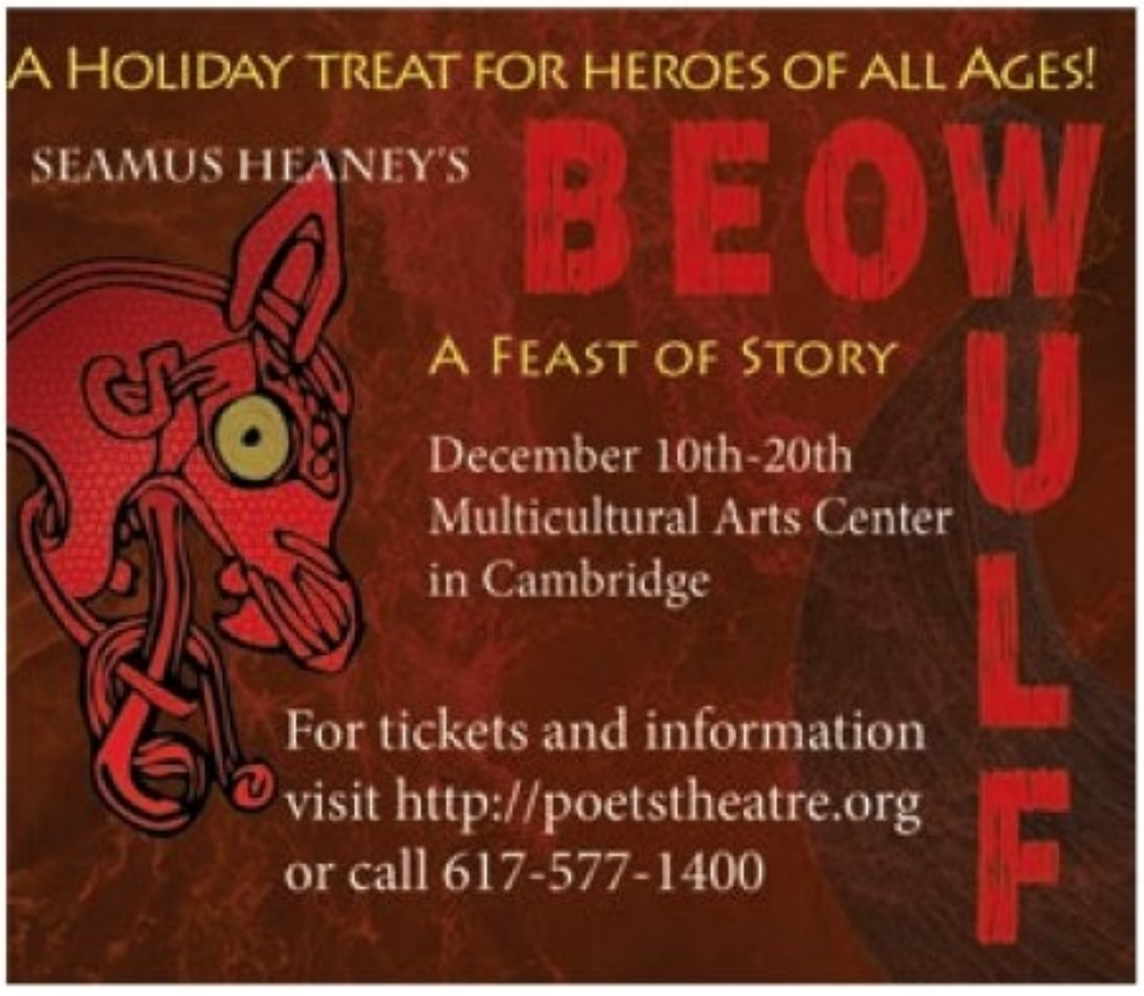
Nothing I could make up would ever top last New Year's Eve. I was performing downtown, I mentioned that I live in New York and most of the crowd booed. I responded that the audience isn't allowed to boo because they're also allowed to leave town — "Good Will Hunting" isn't science fiction. Then I got booed by the entire crowd.

Drew Grant of *The New York Observer* described you as a "pathological sweetheart." How did you turn out so nice despite growing up in New England—America's meanest region?

I have a really lovely family who emphasized treating people well when I was a kid. That said, I love seeing pure New England spite in action. Like, my heart beats to the tune of two guys screaming at each other over who shoveled out which parking space.

What made you decide to record your new special in Somerville? Do you no longer think that you're better than us?

Ryan Donahue — who's very funny — runs a great monthly show at the Davis Square Theater and I figured by recording there, I could get a really nice hometown crowd on the record. Plus, I love Davis Square. Whenever I'm in town I try to arrange it so I can visit Magpie, my favorite quirky gift store, have a burrito at Anna's Taqueria and get coffee from Diesel.



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A celebration of Jewish culture, tech and selfies

8 Nights, 8 Windows is bringing public art for Hanukkah to Boston

RACHEL RACZKA
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If you've noticed this year's holiday window displays looking more high-tech than usual, you can thank the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston and the New Center. The two organizations launched 8 Nights, 8 Windows, an eight-location public art project celebrating Hanukkah through a series of interactive installations.

Each window display hosts the innovative work of local artists for a limited time. Among the must-sees: Saul Baizman and Fish McGill's selfie-powered menorah at Boomerangs Special Edition in the South End (use hashtag #HueMenorah to add your own) and an artificial sunrise at by Gianna Stewart at the Cambridge Trust Co.

Visitors can hashtag selfies with #HueMenorah to be added to this interactive installation at Boomerangs. PROVIDED

Luckily for the backers of the project — which was several years in the making — the timing was just right: The project hits during a rise of public art in the Boston area with large-scale installations at the Lawn on D and the Rose Kennedy Greenway expanding the city's cultural scope.

"It could not be more timely," said Laura Mandel, executive director for the New Center for Arts and Culture. "We happened upon this renaissance, and through every step we've taken, the city has gotten more and more incredible."

Work by students of the Frances Jacobson Early Childhood Center. PROVIDED

Mandel, who served as project lead of a think tank of creative, media and philanthropic consultants for 8 Nights, said the team is already thinking about next year.

"This year we're going to see what works and what doesn't work," Mandel said. "And we'll look at what next year will look like, but we fully intend for this to become an annual event."

The windows went up for the first night of Hanukkah on Sunday, and as its name implies, they're up for the eight nights of the celebration only.

See 8nights8windows.com for a full list of locations on display through next Monday.

Forget you're listening to Shakespeare

Michael Fassbender wanted to make his version of "Macbeth" more modern.

MARYLINE LETERTRE
Metro World News
letters@metro.us

Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard are the latest to play Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.
THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

To be cast as Macbeth is almost as great a rite of passage as playing the title role in "Hamlet," especially when you consider that the talented likes of Ian McKellen, James McAvoy, Orson Welles and Ethan Hawke have all bloodied their hands as the troubled king. This time, William Shakespeare's so-called Scottish play, directed by Justin Kurzel, sees Michael Fassbender take on the tormented Macbeth, alongside a malevolent Marion Cotillard as Lady Macbeth. The Irish actor tells us about his role in this new cinematic version of "Macbeth," the pressure of playing Shakespeare and his talented screen partner.

GETTY IMAGES

Macbeth is an iconic character who's been played time and again. How did you approach playing him?
Like a modern man. He is no more than a soldier who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder after fighting for years, smashing skulls with stones and seeing blood flowing everywhere. When he goes back home to his wife, he receives a staggering blow: He is confused. He thinks that the only way for him to survive is to keep killing people, and he goes insane.

Had you always wanted to do a Shakespeare film?
It wasn't an obsession. In Ireland, where I grew up, Shakespeare was mostly an author that we had to study at school, nothing more. But when I was 19, I went to London to study dramatic art and I started to discover him in a different way, and understand what a genius he was. It's such an honor to be a part of his company.

Is it stressful?
Of course, but that's a part of the fun. The harder part is the language: Finding the right tone and tempo required a huge amount of work. I wanted the audience to forget they were listening to Shakespeare, I wanted them to feel the modernity of his words.

You shot on location in Scotland. How was that?
It was hard. In Ireland, we are used to the rain and the wind, but that was quite extreme. We were always freezing, and wet. That being said, it also put us in this state of restlessness and nervousness that could serve the purpose and the characters.

How was it to work with Marion Cotillard?
She is just the best. I rarely get to work with actresses who are so committed. She can be everything at once: fragile and resilient. She is also able to bring simplicity into the most complex scenes. And she knows how to listen. She is the ideal partner.

And you worked with her again in the "Assassin's Creed" movie, also directed by Justin Kurzel.
I did, but I can't tell you anything about it. It's top secret, but you definitely need to see it. It's a film that will change your life!

Really?
You have no idea.

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Alicia Vikander and Eddie Redmayne play Gerde and Lili Elbe, the latter one of the first trans women, in "The Danish Girl." FOCUS FEATURES

'The Danish Girl'

Director: Tom Hooper
Stars: Eddie Redmayne, Alicia Vikander
Rating: R

●●○○○

As a film about one of the first cases of surgical gender reassignment, "The Danish Girl" is only so-so. As a breakup movie, it's downright radical. The story of Lili Elbe, played by Eddie Redmayne, is told with delicacy, empathy and not a small amount of monotony. The story of how Lili split ways with her ex-wife, Gerda (Alicia Vikander), is delicate but also sharp, insightful, quietly tough and maybe even profound about how love can last even after a good, devastating dumping.

It's the early 1920s when Gerda, then Einar, an esteemed painter, realized she finally felt more comfortable as a woman. For Gerda to stand in her way would be pure selfishness. But Gerda is still losing her soulmate, who even announces late in that Einar no longer exists — he's just a ghost, a figment to live on in their memories.

How to part ways with Gerda without destroying her is the only major dramatic hurdle Lili faces. There's the pioneering surgeries that will eventually take her life, but that just makes this a story of waiting for yet another doomed LGBT character to die a beatific death. "King's Speech" director Tom Hooper's overly tasteful images betray a lack of understanding of what it means to be trans, but the argument that letting someone go can be a form of deepest affection is nearly enough to justify its existence. **MATT PRIGGE**

Here's that giant CGI whale tail you asked for. WARNER BROS. PICTURES

'In the Heart of the Sea'

Director: Ron Howard
Stars: Chris Hemsworth, Cillian Murphy
Rating: PG-13

●●○○○

"In the Heart of the Sea" has whale attacks and sinking ships and men chowing down on men. But those are mere attention-nabbing distractions, especially compared to the literary classic this true tall tale inspired: Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick." If "Sea" is one of those tiresome reminders of the real, not-as-interesting stories behind the myth, then at least it isn't one of those wan twists on immortal classics, a la "Pan" and "Victor Frankenstein."

Our hero is Owen Chase, played by Chris Hemsworth, the manly-manliest actor in cinema today. Owen is the first mate on the Essex, which has a massive quota of whale oil to fill, and when booty proves elusive, they head after a notorious mammal known for taking out ships. This doesn't go swimmingly.

Even with a third act segue into cannibalism, "Sea" goes tastefully PG-13, resorting to telling, not showing. It's too much of a Ron Howard movie, which means it's defiantly cornball even when things turn grim. And it's very 2015 in another way: It's not above falling back on slipshod CGI when it doesn't want to get too real. Still, at least there's Hemsworth, all old-school brawn and barked dialogue. He's often able to save the film with pure muscle. **MP**

Michael Fassbender takes a swing at playing Macbeth in the latest film version of Shakespeare's "The Scottish Play." THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

'Macbeth'

Director: Justin Kurzel
Stars: Michael Fassbender, Marion Cotillard
Rating: R

●●●●○

"Unconventional Director Sets Shakespeare in Time, Place Shakespeare Intended" went a particularly memorable Onion headline. Creatively unfaithful takes on the Bard have so become the norm that it can seem bold that the umpteenth film of "Macbeth" actually unfolds in 11th-century Scotland. But it goes one better. It's grimly realistic, filled with dilapidated castles, rickety shacks, overcast skies and deafening wind, on top of bloody, bloody violence, delivered early and often.

It sounds unique, but even this has been done before. Roman Polanski's 1971 film — made in the wake of the Manson murders — also went bleak-o-rama. But Polanski went with unknown actors, whereas director Justin Kurzel gives you a more conventionally conventional Shakespeare movie trope: established thespians, namely Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard, acting their hearts out as the Macbeths.

Do we demand too much of every Shakespeare film? Isn't there honor in propping up the classics, making sure audiences see a straight-up "Macbeth" and not one set in space or underwater (or, as in the comedy "Scotland, Pa.," in 1970s America)? Even if we spend chunks of "Macbeth" twiddling our thumbs, waiting to see how it will present very familiar plot points, there's a comfort food quality here. And it's not entirely by the books. Cotillard brings a rare vulnerability to the usually venal Lady Macbeth. This one justifies its existence by staying, at least spiritually, true. **MP**

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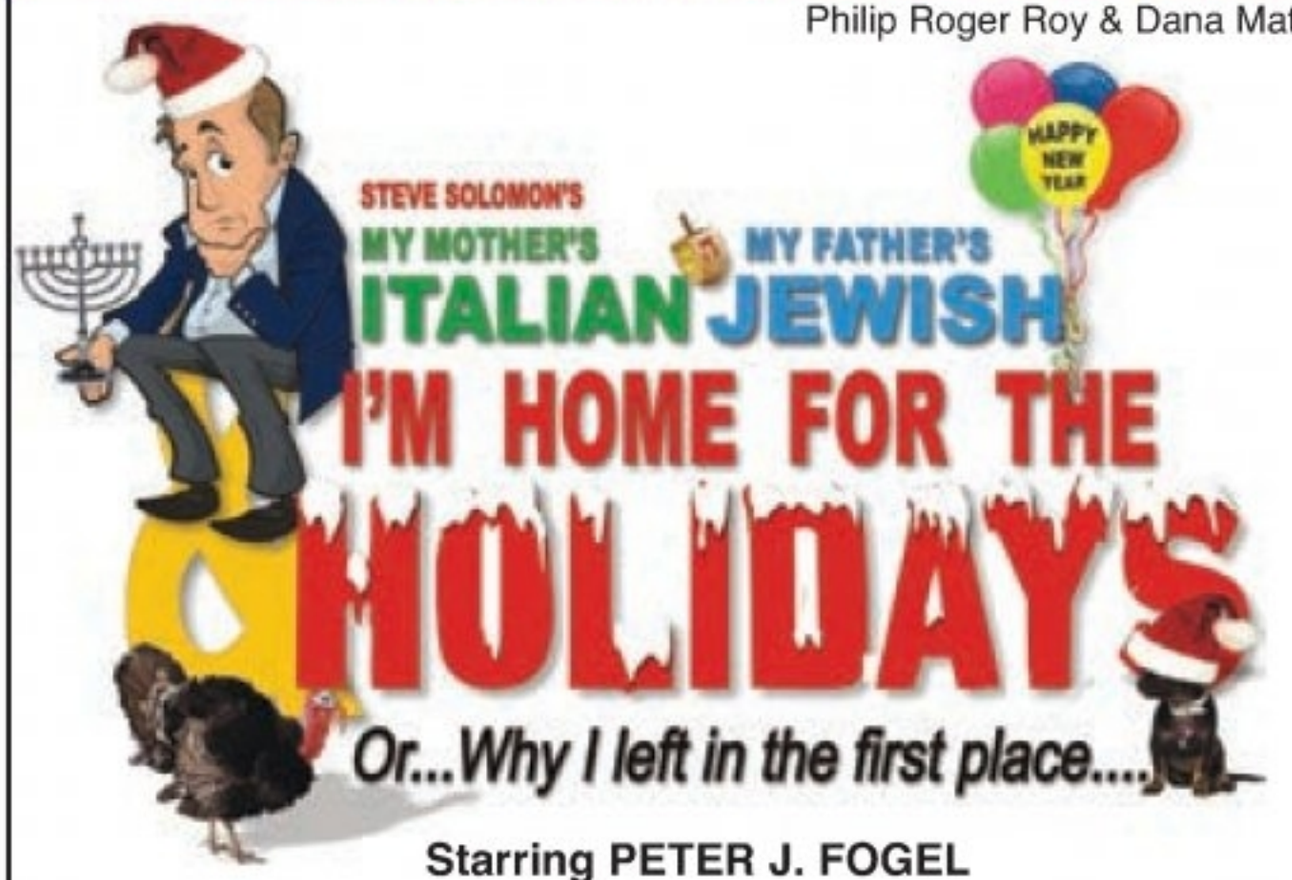
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This week's big winner was Okieboy211, who had shares of two main cogs in the Titans/Jaguars slugfest. This week's contest came down to the last seconds of Monday Night's game and was won by a field goal.

Roethlisberger

The 45-10 pounding Pittsburgh handed the Colts Sunday night was music to fantasy owners ears. Big Ben threw for a whopping 364 yards and 4 TD's. Roethlisberger is undoubtedly one of the best fantasy QB's out there. 16.6% OWNED, 33.86 FANDUEL POINTS (FDPS)

Allen, Johnson

Javorius Allen's value came from his surprising 107 receiving yards Sunday. He also rushed for 63 and had a receiving TD. David Johnson is playing for a Cardinal team that's in a groove right now and he's picked up right where Chris Johnson left off since going down with an injury. JARVORIUS ALLEN: 7.3% OWNED, 29 FDPS DAVID JOHNSON: 30.3% OWNED, 19 FDPS

Brown, Robinson, Bryant

We're running out of superlatives for Antonio Brown. Sunday night he put on another show with 8 catches for 118 yards and two touchdowns. Oh, and he also returned a punt for a TD as well. ANTONIO BROWN: 29.3% OWNED, 33.8 FDPS, ALLEN ROBINSON 9.9% OWNED, 38.3 FDPS, MARTAVIS BRYANT: 14.7% OWNED, 19.4 FDPS

Walker

Delanie Walker is on a roll. This was his third straight game with 12 or more FanDuel points and 90 or more yards receiving. Clearly he and rookie QB Marcus Mariota have a strong connection developing. DELANIE WALKER: 12% OWNED, 19.2 FDPS

Bailey, Chiefs D

DAN BAILEY, K: 2.3% OWNED, 15 FDPS, KANSAS CITY CHIEFS DEFENSE: 2.4% OWNED, 17 FDPS

FanDuel

SOX ARE WINTER CHAMPS

The acquisition of Craig Kimbrel got the ball rolling on what has already been a monster offseason for the Red Sox. GETTY IMAGES

So far, Dave Dombrowski is winning the Major League Baseball offseason.

He's got some competition. Like the Arizona Diamondbacks, for example, who put the NL West on notice after stealing Zack Greinke from the Los Angeles Dodgers and giving up a whole heck of a lot to acquire 25-year-old starter Shelby Miller. The Diamondbacks are going for it right now. And their fans should be happy with that.

Also getting consideration is Theo Epstein and the Chicago Cubs. They may have paid big bucks for a soon-to-be 35-year-old second baseman/outfielder, but they won't regret giving John Lackey $16 million a season for the next two years, considering what the market is for a quality starting pitcher these days.

Just ask Dombrowski and the Red Sox, who signed David Price to a seven-year, $217 million deal last week. You already know how I feel about that signing. I love it. Combined with the trade for one of the best — if not the best — closers in baseball in Craig Kimbrel, Dombrowski could probably have no-showed the Winter Meetings in Nashville this week and would still be the offseason champ.

But he wasn't done there. He then sent Wade Miley to Seattle in a trade that brought in 26-year-old righty reliever Carson Smith from the Mariners. Throwing a sinking fastball that can hit 95 mph, with a nasty slider at 85, Smith just finished his first full MLB season with a 2.31 ERA in 70 innings out of the bullpen. And he's also under team control through the 2020 season.

Whether or not Dombrowski stops there remains to be seen. But as the Winter Meetings wrapped up on Thursday, one thing is for sure: The Red Sox have attacked their positions of need this offseason.

Will it be enough to make them a title contender?

Nope, I'm not talking about the division. The additions of Price and Kimbrel should alone be good enough to make September baseball meaningful in this town once again.

I'm talking World Series.

Here's what we know. The blueprint to having success in the postseason is showcasing at least two above-average starters. Just look at the final four in this year's postseason. Toronto had Price and Marcus Stroman. Kansas City had Johnny Cueto and Yordano Ventura. Chicago had Jake Arrieta and Jon Lester. And New York had, well, they had three in Matt Harvey, Jacob deGrom, and Noah Syndergaard.

Right now, the Red Sox have Price, and a whole group of pitchers in competition to be the No. 2 starter in the rotation. We know how that competition went last year. Not good. Hopefully they leave the creative T-shirts at home this time around. You know, the "I'm the ace," "Who's the ace?," "He's the ace" T's that the Red Sox rotation rocked in spring training. Ya, don't put those in the truck.

Five years ago, I would have pegged Clay Buchholz as the clear-cut No. 2 in a rotation that included Price. But it's not 2010 anymore, and Buchholz is now 31 years old. So let's be serious here.

Eduardo Rodriguez will have the best shot to fulfill that role. And perhaps — if he's not traded — Henry Owens will live up to the hype of being one of the organization's top prospects the last few years. Still, nothing seems guaranteed. And to be completely honest, nobody else in the rotation makes me feel too confident after Price makes his start every fifth day.

So perhaps Dombrowski's work isn't done just yet. And while I'd be all-in on trading for an elite starter this winter (you know the names by now: Jose Fernandez, Chris Sale, Sonny Gray), it seems that type of move will be more realistic at the trade deadline, seeing how Arizona's trade for Miller this week set the bar pretty high. But that doesn't mean you should completely rule it out.

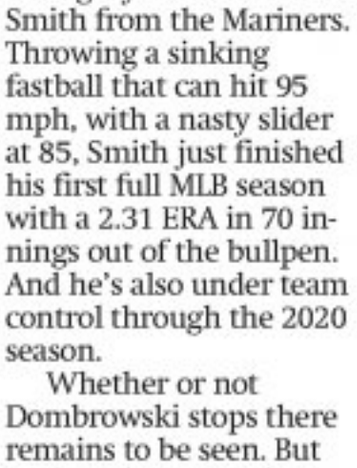
Regardless, if Dombrowski wants to go from offseason winner to World Series champion, he'll have to acquire another top dog in the front of the Red Sox rotation between now and July 31.

That much, I trust he'll do.

DANNY PICARD

OPINION

"The Danny Picard Show" airs every weekday at DannyPicard.com. Danny can also be heard on WEEI 93.7 FM. @dannypicard



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Pats - Texans: What to watch for

Both the Patriots and "Patriots-Lite," aka the Texans, need Sunday's game in a big way.

JAMES TOSCANO
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When you're the New England Patriots, a single loss is enough to make headlines across the nation. But two losses in a row? That's grounds for widespread panic across New England, and music to the ears of everyone else.

Heading into Sunday's game against the Texans (8:30 p.m., NBC), the Patriots will look to avoid their first three-game losing streak since 2002. That's right, the last time the Patriots lost three straight games, people still used road maps to get around. Oh, and they actually talked to each other face to face — not through social media or a smartphone.

But plenty of people are talking about the Patriots lately because they just don't look like themselves. That's probably because some of their most familiar faces aren't on the field currently — and it's showing.

So do they have enough to take down the 6-6 Texans, winners of four of their last five? Here's what to watch for:

1 HOP ON HOPKINS

If you play fantasy football, you've either benefited greatly from owning DeAndre Hopkins on your team, or he's been instrumental in beating you. This guy has been a top wide receiver this season, already with 86 receptions for 1,169 yards and 10 touchdowns — and that's with Brian Hoyer and Ryan Mallett at quarterback. Hopkins has seen his least amount of targets over the last two weeks (17 total) but has at least 11 (and a high of 22) every other week. Expect Patriots cornerback Malcolm Butler to be extremely busy as that's a matchup that will be fun to watch. Also expect some safety help, because if the Pats can take away Hopkins, the Texans don't have a ton of other options.

2 WATCH OUT FOR WATT

J.J. Watt may love to ham it up for the cameras, but you can't say he hasn't earned the airtime. Watt is arguably the game's best defensive player, and has won two Defensive Player of the Year Awards, including last season's award. He comes into the game leading the NFL in sacks with 13.5 and would certainly love to get his hands on Tom Brady. It's a scary thought, especially when you consider how much the Patriots' offensive line struggled last week against the Eagles. To make matters worse, Josh Kline, one of the steadier linemen this season, is dealing with a shoulder injury.

J.J. Watt is arguably the best defensive player in football. GETTY IMAGES

3 STATEMENT GAME

It may sound strange to say that a 10-2 team with the division all but wrapped up needs to put in a strong showing on Sunday, but that's the case with the Patriots. They've looked flat-out bad since the fourth quarter in Denver, and even showed signs of struggling against the Giants and Bills.

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Aries Taking a trip or signing up for a retreat, educational course or anything that will broaden your outlook will lead to a positive change.

Taurus Take a close look at your situation. As long as you take a practical approach, success will follow. Romance is encouraged.

Gemini A make-it-or-break-it situation will arise between you and someone you have shared personal information with. Be careful what you say.

Cancer Speak out about how you see things unfolding. Your progressive action will attract attention and enhance a personal relationship.

Leo Your go-getting attitude will inspire those around you to pitch in and help. Plan a small trip with a special someone.

Virgo Keeping a steady, consistent attitude will help you cope with the unpredictable nature of those around you.

Libra You are best off keeping moving until you are satisfied that you have everything in its place. Idle time will lead to conflicts.

Scorpio Engage in activities and events that encourage you to try new things, and gain depth through the experience you encounter.

Sagittarius Keep everyone guessing until you are fully prepared. Finishing things should be your concern, with discipline helping you.

Capricorn If you want to share, do so in an expressive manner. It's how you present what you believe or do that will capture your audience.

Aquarius Look for the best way to bring about positive change, and make it happen. Don't exhaust yourself because you are too proud to ask for help.

Pisces Ensure that all your papers are in order. Love is highlighted, and money or a gift will come to you from an unexpected source. **EUGENIA LAST**

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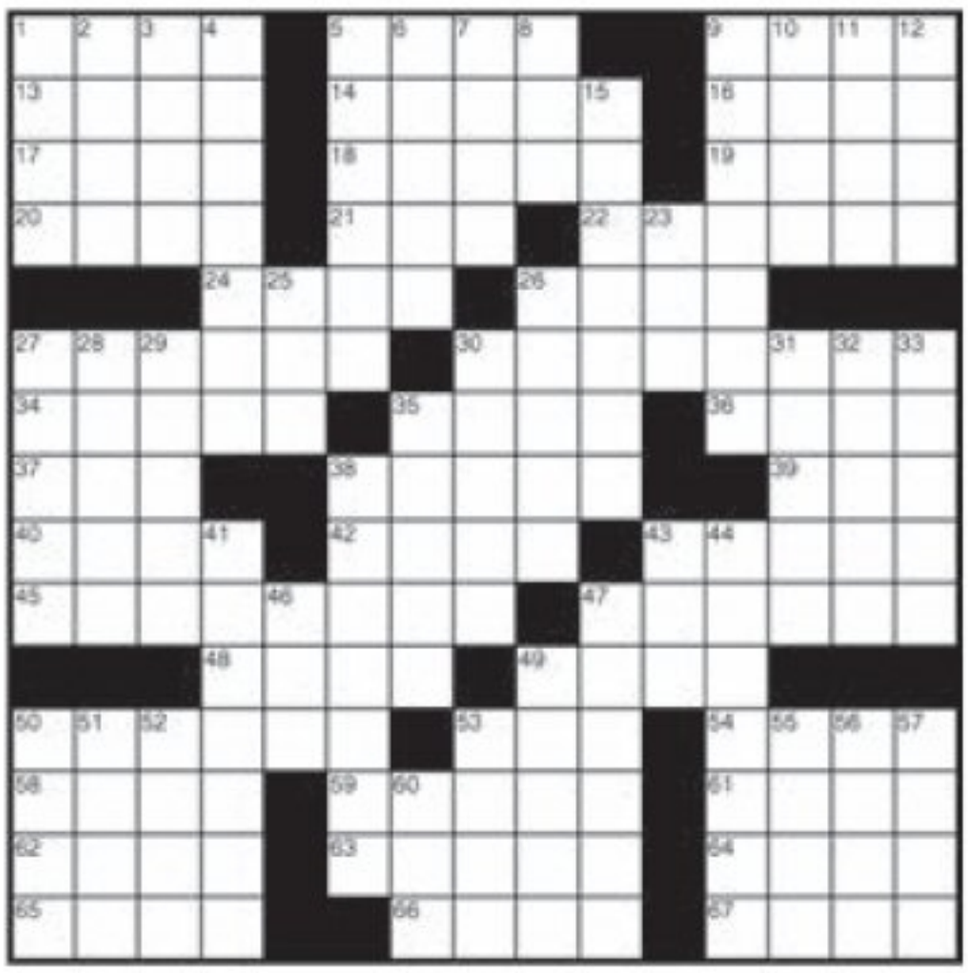

Across

1 Employs
5 Cellar, briefly
9 Wind resistance
13 Caesar's garb
14 Polished off (2 wds.)
16 Country cousin
17 Slugger Moises —
18 Full of flavor
19 Shaman's finding
20 "Bonanza" brother
21 Long sigh
22 Rumple
24 Bede of fiction
26 Thick carpeting
27 Drive-in order
30 Socks and shirts
34 Wan
35 Rather you — me
36 Cat's-paw
37 Help the merchant
38 Jedi allies
39 Tijuana aunt
40 Humorist — Bombeck
42 Tarzan's transport
43 Ascertain
45 Kind of bee
47 Ordered around
48 —-de-camp
49 Elvis swiveled them
50 Digress
53 Large green parrot
54 Relieve tension
58 Kind of rug
59 Hits dead-center
61 Soir follower
62 Thin coating
63 Kind of role
64 Druid
65 Hooray for me! (hyph.)
66 Many August people
67 "Mack the Knife" singer

Down

1 Four Corners state
2 Recital piece
3 They're often inflated
4 Bacon alternative
5 Rummage sale
6 Mirror fogger
7 Chicken wire
8 Noted mummy
9 Crop threatener
10 Cuba exports
11 I.W. or Walter
12 Kind of pool
15 Jungle crushers
23 Feedbag tidbit
25 Bear's refuge
26 Allay, as thirst
27 Naive ones
28 Seize power
29 Limerick, e.g.
30 Cheech's partner
31 Specks
32 Bete --
33 Adrenal, for one
35 Strong cord
38 Obvious
41 The Crimson Tide
43 Prune
44 Soul
46 Mae West role
47 Slants
49 Phone response
50 Ride the rapids
51 Opera tune
52 Canasta play
53 Franklin's flier
55 "The Mammoth Hunters" uthor
56 Housecat's perch
57 Jazzy – James
60 Feel crummy

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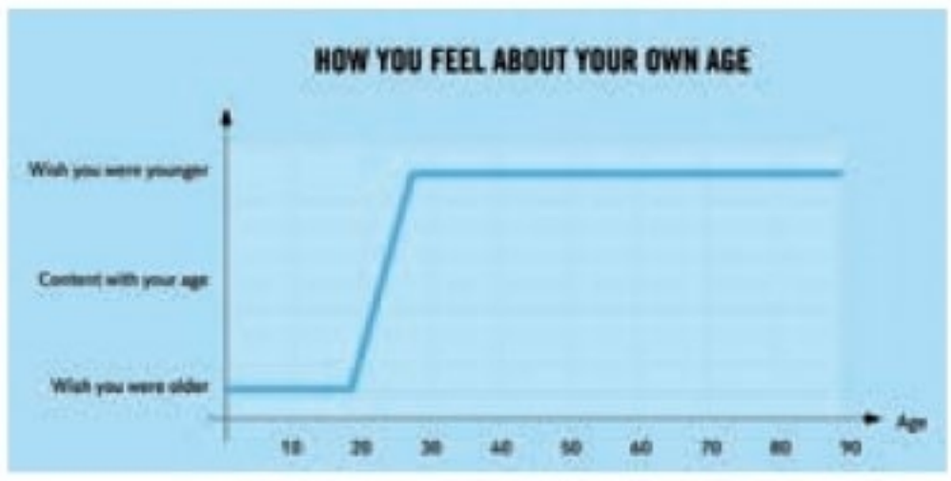

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easy

8				2		7		
	1	9			5	3		2
	5		6		7			
		1				9		5
	2						3	
9		3				8		
			9		6		1	
3		4	7			5	8	
		5		8				9

hard

		6		9				
	8		3		1	2		
	9				4	8		7
7				3	6	5		
8								4
		3	4	5				8
1		8	2				5	
		4	6		3		2	
				1		4		

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